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THE HATAY QUESTION

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COPY NO. 33THE HATAY QUESTION \*

[The Province of Hatay, which was known as the Sanjak of Alexandretta prior to 1938, is an area of approximately 1875 square miles bordering the Gulf of Iskenderun. Its southern border is a part of the Turkish-Syrian frontier. Hatay includes the port of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) and the town of Antakya (Antioch). See attached Map.]

SUMMARY

Rumors have recently come from Damascus that Syria might soon refer the legality of Turkey's sovereignty over the Hatay to "an international body"--which would presumably be the United Nations Security Council or International Court of Justice. Although the Syrian Prime Minister has denied the current rumors, the issue remains a very live one. The Secretary General of the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has expressed the opinion that the rumors are Soviet-inspired, and has stated his hope that if Syria should appeal to the Security Council, the United States would oppose the demands upon the territory of a member of the United Nations. He maintains that Turkey is willing to discuss with Syria concessions in the Hatay, but would never consider renouncing sovereignty over the Turkish province.

The 1921 Franco-Turkish Treaty ceded the Ottoman Turkish Territory of Hatay to France, the mandatory power for Syria and Lebanon. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) confirmed Turkey's renunciation of sovereignty over the territory. When in 1936 France promised Syria and Lebanon full independence after three years, the Turks protested, claiming that the Hatay had been ceded to France as such, not to France as mandatory power, and should also be given independence. The issue was finally referred to the League of Nations, which granted the province quasi-independence from Syria. Although the Turkish population in the Hatay was a minority, the Turks were able to establish an exclusively Turkish provincial government, and in 1938 a republic was proclaimed. The following year the province was incorporated into the Turkish Republic despite the disapproval of the League of Nations. Syria has not recognized Turkish sovereignty over the area.

Besides the strong feeling of nationalism with which both Syria and Turkey view the matter, each country considers the province important to it for economic and strategic reasons. The fruit, olive, grain, tobacco, cotton, and silk crops of the well-watered interior are of considerable value. Furthermore, the Syrians feel that Iskenderun is the natural outlet for northern Syria, and that the country has no

\* Only limited coordination of this report with departmental intelligence agencies has been attained. Substantial dissent, if any, will be submitted at a later date.

other port of comparable usefulness. The Turks regard the Gulf of Iskenderun as essential to the defense of Southern Turkey, and believe that Syria is neither strong enough nor reliable enough to maintain security in this area. They also fear that acceptance of the Syrian claims might establish a dangerous precedent and thus serve to reinforce Soviet claims against northeastern Turkey.

An amicable settlement of the potentially dangerous Hatay problem would be a great contribution to the political stability of the Near East. The likelihood of a compromise appears remote, however, because Turkey refuses even to discuss the question of sovereignty while existing nationalistic sentiment in Syria probably will not allow the Syrian Government to negotiate on any basis which implies acknowledgment of Turkish rights. The Turks are willing to consider minor frontier rectifications and the concession of port facilities in Iskenderun harbor. If the two countries could meet in a friendly atmosphere, it is possible that, by using these considerations as a basis for discussion, they might find a satisfactory solution. If, on the other hand, the Syrians do appeal, for example, to the Security Council, they can probably count not only on the support of Arab states, which naturally side with Syria in the dispute, but also on that of the USSR and its satellites. Under these conditions, Western support of Turkey will alienate the Arab states, while support of Syria will weaken Turkish morale and resistance to the USSR. This dilemma would be averted if the raising of the Hatay issue could be postponed until the volatile feelings of the young nationalistic Syrian state have subsided, permitting a calmer atmosphere for bilateral discussion.

Further discussion of the Hatay question is contained in the Enclosure hereto.

ENCLOSURECurrent Situation.

Recent rumors originating in Damascus and indicating that the Syrian Government might soon refer the Hatay question (i.e., the legality of Turkey's sovereignty over this area) to "an international body" (presumably either the UN Security Council or International Court of Justice) have been denied by the Syrian Prime Minister. The denial, however, was worded in such a way as to keep the issue alive. The Prime Minister maintained that "the Syrian Government is very vigilant to protect and defend the country's vital interests."

The Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Turkish press have shown considerable concern about these rumors. Editorialists, expressing their belief that the rumors are inspired by the USSR, call upon the Syrians to "come to their senses and to stop oppressing the Turks in Northern Syria", although they adduce no real evidence that any such oppression exists. The Secretary General of the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, F. C. Erkin, before the rumors were denied, expressed to US Ambassador Wilson in Ankara the hope that, if Syria were indeed to apply to the Security Council, the US would oppose such demands upon the territory of a member of the United Nations. He also expressed the view that the Turkish-Syrian frontier had been laid down by treaty and that, if such frontiers were to be subject to review by the Security Council, no existing borders could be regarded as secure. It was also Erkin's belief that the USSR was promoting these demands, which, if carried out, would cause very high feeling among the Turks and prompt them to make counter-demands, such as the return of the former Ottoman Turkish city of Aleppo and other regions. Meanwhile, he said that the present status of the Hatay constituted neither a threat to peace nor a situation likely to endanger peace. Erkin maintained that Turkey was quite prepared to discuss with Syria such matters as an offer of facilities in the port of Iskenderun, minor frontier rectifications, and the registration of property titles, but would never agree to consider renouncing sovereignty over the "Turkish territory of Hatay".

Recent Historical Background.

Turkish-French Treaty of Ankara - 1921. In the Treaty with France drawn up at Ankara on 20 October 1921, the Turkish nationalists (who later founded the Republic) renounced sovereignty over the Ottoman Turkish territory of Iskenderun (Hatay) to France, the mandatory power for Syria and Lebanon. In return, the French agreed to withdraw their troops from Southern Turkey, which they had occupied following Turkey's defeat in World War I. Thus considerable Turkish forces were released to join in combat against invading Greek armies. While the French were given certain economic concessionary privileges in Turkey, some bound-

any revisions were agreed upon which were favorable to the Turks because they included in Turkey a long stretch of the East-West railroad line to Iraq via Syria. The French also promised that Turks in the Hatay were to be given privileged treatment.

The French Mandate. France was awarded a mandate over Syria and Lebanon in accordance with the Allied Agreement of San Remo in 1920 and later by consent of the League of Nations (24 July 1922). The terms of the mandate as finally drawn up under League of Nations auspices specify (Article 4) that "the mandatory shall be responsible for seeing that no part of the territory of Syria and the Lebanon is ceded or leased or in any way placed under the control of a foreign power."

Treaty of Lausanne - 1923. In the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, which definitively established Turkey's postwar borders, the nationalist Turkish Government agreed to renounce "all rights and titles whatsoever over or respecting the territories outside the frontiers laid down in the present Treaty....."

Turkish-Syrian Convention of Friendship - 1926. This agreement confirmed the Turkish-French Treaty of Ankara of 1921.

French-Syrian Treaty of 1936. Upon announcement of this treaty, according to which France promised Syria and Lebanon full independence after three years, the Turks at once protested, particularly since the treaty transferred to independent Syria all international commitments assumed by France as mandatory power, on behalf of that State. The Turkish attitude was that Turkey had given the Hatay to France, as such, not to France as mandatory power for Syria. The Turks maintained that by relinquishing the mandate, France created a situation which was not contemplated when the peace treaties were signed, and that the French, in giving Syria and Lebanon their independence, should also--and separately--free the Hatay. After considerable controversy, both France and Turkey agreed to refer the issue to the League of Nations. On 29 May 1937 a committee appointed by the League produced a Statute and Fundamental Law for the Hatay which both parties accepted. The Hatay was granted independence in internal matters, while monetary control and customs administration were to be directed jointly by the Hatay and Syria, the latter state being responsible for the direction of foreign relations. An Assembly was to be formed, composed of 40 members representing the various communities in the Hatay, in accordance with the number of registered voters. The Turks began at once doing their utmost to ensure for themselves a majority in the Assembly.

Through Quasi-Independence to Turkish Sovereignty. While the registration of voters was being carried out, rioting and strikes occurred and the Hatay was placed under martial law, Turkish troops being permitted to assist in maintaining order. The French seemed to be conniving in the establishment of full Turkish control; they were apparently more interested in maintaining a friendly Turkey in the Eastern

Mediterranean during this critical period (1938-1939) in world affairs, than in battling for the rights of Syria, over which France had already agreed to withdraw control. The first Assembly met in September 1938 and, although Turks in the Hatay were outnumbered by other groups combined (see ethnic statistics below), as a result of Turkey's machinations and French connivance an exclusively Turkish Government was elected, and the Republic of Hatay was proclaimed. The Republic lasted less than a year, however, for in 1939 France renounced its interests altogether in the Hatay and on 23 July (without sanction of the League of Nations and, indeed, despite the clearly expressed disapproval of the League) it was incorporated into the Turkish Republic and became--as it now remains--a Turkish Province.

Attitude of Syria and the League of Nations. Not only did the League of Nations, through its Permanent Mandates Commission, protest against this settlement, but so also did the Syrians. Partly because of delays in the transmission of documents, however, no positive action was taken, and upon the outbreak of World War II, the whole issue was laid aside. Since Syria has won its independence, no Syrian Government has recognized Turkey's sovereignty over the Hatay and the Syrian press perennially attacks such sovereignty. Indeed, if any government of Syria were to announce its acceptance of Turkish sovereignty over the area, it would immediately be forced out of office. The Turks, on the other hand, who feel just as strongly that they are in the right, delayed for years their recognition of Syrian and Lebanese independence. When on 2 March 1946 Turkey did finally recognize the independence of both States, the issue of sovereignty over the Hatay was carefully side-stepped.

#### Ethnic and Economic Aspects.

Ethnic. While exact population figures are not obtainable, the following (French) estimate for 1936 is the most accurate available:

<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Ethnic Origin</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Language</u>
99,000	45%	Mixed Arab	Sunni Moslem, Heterodox Moslem (Alouite), Christian	Arabic
85,000	39%	Turkish	Sunni Moslem	Turkish
29,000	13%	Armenian	Christian	Armenian, Turkish
7,000	3%	Circassians, Kurds, Jews, Turcomans, etc.		-
220,000	100%			

Since annexation of the Hatay by the Turkish Republic, considerable numbers of Arabs and Armenians have emigrated, chiefly to Syria. It is these emigrants who constitute the chief source of complaints in Syria against continued Turkish sovereignty. An additional source of agitation for removal of Turkish control of the Hatay is the vociferous nationalistic element of the Syrian population. Some Turk-

ish nationals have moved into the Province, chiefly into urban areas, for there has been no large-scale program of rural re-settlement. Thus, though no reliable statistics are available, it is now likely that a majority of the population is Turkish. Turks in the Hatay may be regarded as loyal citizens of the Republic and, due to the equality of treatment accorded Circassians and Turcomans in Turkey, it is probable that many among these two groups would prefer to remain in the Republic and would probably elect to do so if given an opportunity to express their wish by plebiscite. The Arabs and Armenians, however, undoubtedly would prefer Syrian rule, and the Kurdish minority would probably also prefer separation from the stringent control and supervision to which all Kurds are subjected in Turkey, where they form by far the largest minority group in the Republic.

Economic. The port of Iskenderun is of considerable importance to both countries--Northern Syria and South Central Turkey (eastward and northeastward of Adana) are its natural hinterland. It is, however, of particular value to Northern Syria, and the economic development of the Aleppo area must always be seriously retarded as long as it is deprived of this natural outlet. The port's usefulness to Aleppo, Syria's largest city, has been diminished not only by the artificial boundary line which separates Aleppo and the port, but also because the Aleppo market center is not connected with Iskenderun by rail except by a very circuitous route via Toprakkale (see Map), well north of the Turkish border. It is quite evident that construction of a direct rail link between Aleppo and Iskenderun, provided Syria enjoyed rights to use of the harbor, would be of great benefit to Syria in general and to the Aleppo district in particular.

The strategic importance of Iskenderun to Turkey became most obvious during World War II when, with British aid, the Turks constructed a railroad pier capable of serving ocean-going vessels in the harbor. Since Axis occupation of Greece and some of the Aegean islands effectively closed the Turkish Straits to Allied shipping, Lend-Lease shipments to Turkey were discharged at the ports of Mersin and Iskenderun. The Turks see in Iskenderun not only great logistic value but strategic military importance as well, in that it constitutes a potential route of invasion into South Central Turkey. The British have also shown their interest in the area by assisting the Turks during World War II in the construction of good roads in this vicinity. The fruit, olive, grain, tobacco, and cotton-growing and silk-cultivating country of the Hatay's well-watered interior is of considerable economic importance, although not vitally so to either Turkey or Syria. Claims as to potentially valuable chromite and petroleum deposits have not been substantiated. There are reports, however, that serious consideration is being given in Ankara to a projected program of drilling for oil in the Adana area, a project which might well include the sinking of wells near the Syrian border and in the Hatay itself.



### Attitude of Syria and Turkey.

Convinced that they have strong juridical rights to the Hatay, the Syrians will not lightly abandon their claims. They feel that, historically and geographically, Iskenderun is the natural outlet for Northern Syria and the Aleppo hinterland. They also point out that Syria has no other port of comparable usefulness and that its loss, therefore, is of far greater consequence to Syria than to Turkey, which possesses a fair harbor at Mersin, not far to the west. The Syrians feel also that they were cheated out of the Hatay while they were powerless to voice an effective protest, let alone enforce their rights, at a time when the Turkish population was a minority. Above all, they feel that they have an unanswerable argument in that France relinquished the territory to Turkey in direct violation of the mandate and against the vigorous protest of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission.

The Turks, on the other hand, have attempted to show that there has always been a majority of Turks in the area (a claim which available statistics, however unreliable, do not support) and that there is a larger Turkish majority there now. The late Turkish President, Ataturk, asserted again and again that Turkey would never be reconciled to abandoning territory where a majority of the population are Turks; it would be a bold Turkish Government indeed that would dare to tamper with such a "sacred trust", left to the Turks by their "eternal chief". The Turks insist that the territory was given to France in 1921 as a western power, not as mandatory, and that the Syrians never had and do not now have any rights to it whatsoever.

The Turkish Army General Staff regards the Gulf of Iskenderun and its vicinity as essential for the defense of Southern Turkey, since it is logistically useful and strategically valuable, partially controlling the plains south of the Taurus Mountains. The Turks feel that independent Syria is neither strong enough nor reliable enough to maintain security in this area, while France (at any rate in 1921) was believed capable of doing so. Turkey, on the other hand, is an important factor for peace and stability in the Near and Middle East. Furthermore, the Turks believe that satisfaction of Syrian claims to the Hatay, apart from damaging Turkish national pride and morale, might well provide a disastrous precedent and thus offer the Soviets an opportunity to reinforce their claims on behalf of the Georgian and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics for annexation of large and strategically valuable areas in northeastern Turkey.

### Probable Future Developments.

The Turks appear willing to grant important concessions, but both sides are sure to find compromise extremely difficult because of the point-blank Turkish refusal even to discuss the question of sovereignty. Meanwhile, Turkish attempts to strengthen relations with Arab States to the south are prejudiced, since such States naturally take a



sympathetic view of the Syrian case. The Syrians will tend to rely upon members of the Arab League to support any plea they may decide to make. The Syrian Government has shown no indication that it will enlist Soviet support in this matter, although (if the case were to be placed before the UN Security Council) the USSR and its satellites may be counted upon to support Syria against Turkey. Meanwhile, the Soviets will doubtless see to it that the issue is kept alive--no difficult task while the Syrian press and public maintain their present indignant attitude. Every Syrian cabinet will take the customary position that it is in favor of "reversion" of the Hatay's sovereignty to Syria, though none has yet attempted officially to advance an energetic claim. If, however, the Syrian Government does decide to appeal to the Security Council, or to submit its case to the International Court of Justice, the Turkish attitude will undoubtedly harden still further. The Turks are more than willing to grant Syria almost any concession or privilege in the Hatay, provided there is no infringement of what they regard as Turkey's territorial integrity.

Unofficially, the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has indicated that it is prepared to negotiate with Syria not only in regard to minor frontier rectifications but also for the concession of port facilities in Iskenderun harbor. Such a concession is capable of expansion to include special customs and transit privileges, use of bonded warehouses, waiving of harbor dues, and the like, in such a way as to eliminate so far as possible the obstacles inherent in commercial use of a foreign port. A good metalled road already connects Aleppo and Iskenderun, and this can subsequently be supplemented by construction of a new railroad line or of a spur between the port and the Aleppo-Fevzipasa line (see Map). This will become feasible and desirable if the two governments come to terms.

A possible basis of compromise might be provided if Turkey would offer Syria all territory in the Hatay on the left bank of the Asi (ancient Orontes) River. This territory includes the town of Antakya (Antioch), the seat of a Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the great majority of whose adherents are in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine; the Patriarch himself actually lives in Damascus.

In view of present Syrian public opinion on the subject of sovereignty, it will be very difficult for a Syrian Government to enter into negotiations with Turkey on any basis which would, even by implication, indicate acknowledgment of Turkish rights. There must first be a diminution in local attempts to stir up nationalistic sentiments and abstention on the part of Soviet or other foreign agents from efforts to keep the issue alive, or at least such insidious activities must be effectively countered. Given time and a calmer atmosphere in which to discuss the problem, representatives of the two nations can meet and perhaps find some formula acceptable to both which will permit removal of this potentially dangerous issue from the international scene. Such a settlement would greatly contribute toward Syrian prosperity and to the political stability of the Middle East.

# THE HATAY

